



Warden Gary Rankin

## WARDEN STORIES

### *Animal Encounters*

*By Gary Rankin*

One of the rewards of being a game warden is contact with an array of wildlife.

We see a variety of common game taken by hunters, with an occasional oddity such as a black duck.

Injured and sick animals are a steady source of business. Deer with broken legs, moose with parasites, or hawks with broken wings are all sad cases. Most of these we are not able to help and they have to be put down. This is one of the *worst* parts of a warden's job.

Sometimes we investigate reports of unusual or rare animals. In northeastern North Dakota that has included confirmed sightings of bears, mountain lions, otters, fishers, grey foxes and flying squirrels.

Dead animals also require attention. Some are picked up and checked for disease. Some are victims of criminal activity. Some are evidence of an environmental problem.

With that in mind, one day during March 2004 I headed toward northeastern Grand Forks County to check out a report of a dead bald eagle beneath a power line.

Over time, improperly constructed power lines have proven to be a hazard to raptors. Power companies have learned how to arrange their wires to avoid electrocuting birds of prey, but it still occasionally happens. The U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service keeps records of these incidents to make sure there isn't a problem over a certain section of line.

It is also important to retrieve dead eagles. The Fish and Wildlife Service gives the birds to members of Indian tribes, who use the feathers for traditional ceremonies and costumes.

As I approached the reported spot, I did indeed see a bird on the ground beneath the power lines, orange feet extended skyward as the pathetic creature reposed on its back. From a distance, the bird's gray shade didn't look quite right for an eagle, and those skyward feet seemed a little colorful.

After a short walk, a close inspection revealed a bird of somewhat less nobility than an eagle. A chicken, someone's common barnyard fowl, was lying there in the snow.

By its proximity to the road, my guess is that someone in the neighborhood, disgusted with a dead chicken in his yard, gave the hen a ride and tossed her to a resting place beneath the power line, where a well-meaning passerby noticed it and phoned in a report.

I left the chicken in peace. The power company would not have to be concerned about its line design, and I had further reason to never be totally surprised by what I find on my next critter call.

**GARY RANKIN** is a district game warden stationed at Larimore.